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SUBJECT: USEB 149: KIRKUK'S ARAB VILLAGES ADJUST TO
TRANSITION; IMPRESSIONS ON THE ROAD TO RASHAD

[¶1](#). SUMMARY. The Arab villages west and south of Kirkuk are mostly poor and underdeveloped. Thanks to extensive work by the Coalition Provisional Authority, USAID and U.S. military forces in the area, the USG has developed excellent working relationships with local tribal and political leaders. A visit by Kirkuk Embassy Regional Office PolOffs on July 15 to two of these villages - Rashad and Yaychi - shows how villagers are adjusting to life after transition. END SUMMARY.

U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE

[¶2](#). Changes in Rashad and Yaychi since the handover of sovereignty have been significant. Violence has decreased, IED attacks against U.S. military convoys are at a post-liberation low, and local authorities take particular pride in keeping their villages crime free. Gaines Mills, the nearest military forward operating base to both Rashad and Yaychi, houses a unit from the Second Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division based at Kirkuk Air Base. The base sits in a huge open field 30 kilometers west of Kirkuk. The only other FOB in the area - McHenry -- is 70 kilometers away and covers the villages of Hawija, Riyadh and areas further west. In all, the two FOBs cover hundreds of villages, conducting patrols and engaging with local leaders on a regular basis. Officers from the U.S. Embassy's Regional Office in Kirkuk accompany them when time permits. They visited the towns on July 15.

RASHAD

[¶3](#). It took PolOffs 55 minutes to drive from Kirkuk to Rashad, 45 kilometers to the southwest. Along the paved road, shacks sold ice, wheat and produce. Lamb carcasses hung from hooks in the 110 degree heat of the morning. Along the way, a short bridge crossing an aqueduct flowed with water. After the bridge, hints of greenery appeared, sunflowers and flocks of sheep and goats dotted the landscape. Agriculture and livestock form the area's economic backbone.

[¶4](#). Rashad Township consists of 66 villages, some with as few as three households, some with hundreds, covering a large area of Kirkuk Province that stretches south to the border with Salah al-Din. The main road from Kirkuk to Tikrit bisects the region. Unpaved roads lead to some villages, while others have no vehicle access at all.

[¶5](#). A collection of mud and brick structures two minutes off the road make up Rashad, the main town in a district of 20,000 people. The majority of the population is Arab, mostly from the Al-Ubaidi tribe, one of the oldest and largest in Iraq. The houses in the town blend into the surrounding brown terrain -- except for three new, white structures: the police station, the city council building, and the communications center. Coalition funds built all three.

[¶6](#). Except for three policemen standing guard outside the new station, Rashad's streets were empty when PolOffs arrived. The police chief's office was spacious and air

conditioned but plain. His desk was bare except for the desk set, an Iraqi flag and a telephone on one corner. The telephone only recently started working -- the first to work in the township since the liberation.

¶17. Ten men buzzed about inside the office. Four wore traditional garb: headscarves and robes. Two wore business attire. The rest wore crisp, new police uniforms, all provided by CPA. The men in traditional garb were shaikhs, including Shaikh Louis, the mayor of Rashad.

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO RASHAD

¶18. The U.S. military has provided USD 400,000 in assistance to Rashad since liberation, drawn from the Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP). The money paid for police checkpoints, new schools, bridges, water trucks and the communications center.

¶19. Shaikh Louis pointed out that the village's needs remain great: water, electricity, roads and a new hospital. Residents cannot safely consume the local well water, and the six water trucks that CPA bought for USD 20,000 cannot deliver to all the villages. If the Coalition were to pave more roads, Shaikh Louis said, water delivery would be easier. Electrical service is erratic, and the mayor said Rashad needs additional electrical lines. To get medical aid, citizens must be taken to Kirkuk. There are two local doctors, but they are ill-equipped. The police chief said that when one of his men is shot, there is no way to provide emergency treatment short of driving to Kirkuk.

CEREMONIES

¶10. At the city council building, the mayor and the local U.S. military commander raised the Iraqi flag over the building in a symbolic display of the handover from CPA authority to local governance. Speeches followed, with town council members and civil servants braving the intense midday heat to attend. Two U.S. government-funded members of the Kirkuk press recorded the event.

¶11. The big event on July 7, when PolOffs visited, was the opening of the new communications center. The center has the capacity for 500 telephone lines, where none existed in the town since the war. Before the opening, residents of Rashad had to drive to Kirkuk to make a phone call.

THE KURDISH QUESTION

¶12. Few Kurds live in the surrounding area, but animosity toward them is strong. Two policemen had been shot and wounded in Rashad the night before PolOffs' visit, one fatally. Describing the incident the police chief said it was surely the work of "outsiders," meaning Kurdish infiltrators.

¶13. There were also complaints about ministry offices in Kirkuk, many now dominated by Kurds. For example, Rashad's leaders complained that the Department of Water, which is run by Kurds, has stopped up the water pipes that Arab farmers depend on to water their crops. The mayor and others listed additional grievances: Kurds are taking Arab land and the Kirkuk police chief is biased against Arabs. When asked to provide proof, a shaikh left the room and returned with a DVD. On the television screen, the Kirkuk chief of police was shown making what looks like a stump speech: "Kirkuk is not just a part of Kurdistan. Kirkuk is the heart of Kurdistan." He repeated the phrase twice. Rashad's political elite said they believe their case is open and shut.

YAYCHI

¶14. Yaychi is 60 kilometers northeast of Rashad and resembles its sister town in some ways: the brown hut-like houses; power lines running in all directions; and a few new buildings that stand apart. In some ways, the two are distinct. In Yaychi, the schools are painted with splashes of color, children play outside and people are on the streets even in the 120 degree midday heat.

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO YAYCHI

¶15. Where the police chief's office in Rashad was stark, the mayor's office was steeped with paperwork and pictures of himself with U.S. military personnel. After greeting PolOffs, Yaychi's Mayor Abdul Kareem broke into a serenade of thanks for all the projects the U.S. has brought his people. Yaychi has received USD 250,000 worth of U.S. military aid from CERP funds. A man brought forward a two-and-a-half meter tall, one meter wide board filled with photos and descriptions of projects the town has completed with these DFI funds: new schools, new mosques, a renovated hospital, paved roads, new bridges, a police station, even a veterinary hospital. He then handed certificates of thanks to each military officer in the room and had his photo taken handing them out.

¶16. The local Coalition military commander gave a short speech that climaxed in the statement that these projects were a "testimony of a government that cares about its people." Mentioning the oil pipeline that runs through the villages, he said that "attacks on the pipeline directly hurt the people of this community." He also encouraged Yaychi's people to turn in to proper authorities those who would harm the township. Mayor Abdul Kareem responded with the message that "our economy is improving....everyone has benefited from liberation," ending with "Thank you for our liberation."

CEREMONIES

¶17. The visit to Yaychi had the same purpose as the visit to Rashad a ceremonial handover of sovereignty from CPA to the local government and a flag-raising in front of the city council building to mark the occasion. A small group of people witnessed the ceremony and listened as local dignitaries make speeches. Along with all the members of the Yaychi town council, the police chief from Rashad came as a visiting public figure. He said he plans to combine the two localities' police forces under his command.

¶18. With one ceremony over, the group piled into new, CPA-purchased police trucks for a two-minute drive to the highlight of the day: the ribbon-cutting at a new marketplace established with CERP funds. The marketplace contained six cement stalls linked together on the outskirts of town. The mayor and the U.S. military commander surrounded themselves with locals and created a ceremony for the ribbon cutting. "Tomorrow," the mayor said aloud, "people selling food, drinks, clothing and other goods will fill these stalls."

AGAIN, THE KURDISH QUESTION

¶19. Of the 38 villages in Yaychi, three are Kurdish and another three Turkman, so residents rarely blame particular "outsiders" for town problems. Still, during PolOffs' visit, council members poured their problems on the military commander and hinted at a Kurdish conspiracy. The municipal departments in Kirkuk continued to ignore them,

and the council members pointed specifically to three departments -- agriculture, water and municipalities -- all Kurdish-controlled. The members said that they did not feel a particular discrimination against Kurds, the people of Yaychi only want the services they feel they are due.

¶20. The complaints continued. The mayor has to pay for his own bodyguards. None of the department employees come from Kirkuk to visit them or hear their requests. The local Government receives complaints in Kurdish and feels compelled to respond to the complaints, but has no Kurdish translators. "Arabic is the language of the Koran. It should be good enough for Yaychi," one council member concluded.

OTHER VILLAGES

¶21. The Coalition has assisted many other villages in Kirkuk besides Rashad and Yaychi. USAID, for example, provided 13 km of paved road in the far southwest corner of Kirkuk province near the village of al-Asfar. The project cost USD 557,000 of which USAID contributed USD 429,000 drawn from appropriated funds under the Community Action Program (CAP). The remainder came from local contributions. Local government teams with AID contractor RTI worked with the local council committees in training them on preparing bid packages and making transparent decisions.

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